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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRETORIA 002818

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SUBJECT: MBEKI TO PUT POSITIVE SPIN ON ZIMBABWE MEDIATION
AT SADC SUMMIT

REF: A. PRETORIA 2210

[1](#)B. TRENKLE-HILL EMAIL OF 6/19/2007

[1](#)C. PRETORIA 2414

[1](#)D. GABORONE 1031

[1](#)E. PRETORIA 2646

[1](#)F. PRETORIA 1447

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Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Donald Teitelbaum. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Despite limited progress on the core political issues, President Mbeki will likely paint an upbeat picture for SADC Heads of State on his Zimbabwe political facilitation at the upcoming summit in Lusaka. Mbeki believes the positive spin will help keep the GOZ negotiators at the table and open the door to GOZ political concessions as the economic situation in Zimbabwe deteriorates. Mbeki will point to the latest round of secret talks which took place in South Africa August 4-6. While the two sides agreed to pursue reforms through the pending Constitutional Amendment 18, they did not reach consensus on core issues such as repealing repressive laws and reforming the electoral system. We continue to be skeptical about the prospects of the Mbeki facilitation in Zimbabwe, but note that the SAG is under increasing domestic pressure to deal with the situation. END NOTE.

Two Rounds of Talks; Limited Progress

[1](#)2. (C) Negotiators from the Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ) and opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) met in South Africa August 4-6, according to IDASA political analyst Sydney Masamvu and MDC Treasurer Roy Bennett (protect both). (NOTE: Despite the tensions between the two MDC camps, Secretaries General Tendai Biti and Welshman Ncube both

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participated in the talks. END NOTE.) Masamvu received separate read-outs on the talks from Department of Foreign

Affairs Director General Ayanda Ntsaluba and MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai. In a significant concession to the GOZ, South Africa and the MDC agreed to work with the GOZ-proposed Constitutional Amendment 18, instead of insisting on a new constitution. The South Africans and MDC believe they can achieve their goals by "front loading" Amendment 18 with the necessary political reforms to level the playing field before the March 2008 elections, and will deal with the broader constitutional reforms at a later date.

13. (C) According to Masamvu, the two sides did not reach agreement on five "sticking points":

-- the status of the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and Access to Information and Privacy Act (AIEPA) (MDC wants both repealed),

-- diaspora vote (the MDC wants diaspora to be able to vote),

-- proportional representation (the MDC wants a PR system; the GOZ wants single-member constituencies),

-- legalization of the death penalty (the GOZ wants the death penalty; the MDC doesn't), and

-- demarcation of parliamentary districts.

In Masamvu's opinion, these are the key issues that must be resolved before Zimbabwe can hold free and fair elections.

14. (C) The August 4-6 meeting was only the second time the GOZ negotiators met formally with the South African Government (SAG) team, led by SAG Minister for Provincial and Local Government Sydney Mufamadi, since the March 31 SADC Extraordinary Summit tasked Mbeki to facilitate political dialogue between the MDC and GOZ (although we understand the GOZ and MDC negotiators have met privately in Harare). During the first round of talks, on June 17-18, the two sides

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agreed on an agenda (refs A and B). ZANU-PF negotiators failed to show up for planned talks in mid-July, a snub that received wide press coverage and led to a SAG statement denying that "Mugabe has spurned the SADC-led facilitation process" (ref C).

Mbeki to Put Best Face on Facilitation

15. (C) Despite the limited concrete movement on core political issues, Masamvu believes that President Mbeki will tell his colleagues at the upcoming SADC Summit in Lusaka that he is making progress in his facilitation effort. He will point to agreement on procedural issues, as well as improvements on the ground, like the lifting of the ban on MDC rallies and the release of most opposition leaders from jail. According to Masamvu, Mbeki believes that he must keep the GOZ negotiators at the table and that an overly negative report will undermine SADC's influence with Mugabe. Over time, the economic implosion in Zimbabwe will, the SAG hopes, force the GOZ to make political concessions. Although everyone is focused on the Mbeki political readout, Masamvu believes the report of the SADC Secretariat on the economic situation in Zimbabwe (ref D) could be even more significant in terms of pressuring Mugabe.

16. (C) DFA's Ntsaluba assured Masamvu that the SAG has a "no-nonsense" attitude toward the crisis in Zimbabwe. The increasing number of Zimbabweans crossing the border affects South Africa directly (ref E). Ntsaluba told Masamvu the Government of Botswana is even more frustrated than South Africa and "wants to take the gloves off" with Mugabe at the SADC Summit, in large part because of the impact of the Zimbabwean refugee/migration crisis on Botswana's economy.

Mbeki Spent Force?

¶17. (C) Institute for Security Studies (ISS) analyst Chris Maroleng told PolOff August 7 that he believes Mbeki's facilitation in Zimbabwe is a "spent force." Mbeki is increasingly focused on his own domestic political survival in advance of the December 2007 ANC elections. Mugabe is simply "waiting Mbeki out," Maroleng claimed. Maroleng also suggested that no faction in ZANU-PF is strong enough to take on Mugabe, although this could change in the coming months as the economic situation deteriorates. Maroleng and Masamvu agreed that the lack of any effective internal pressure from the MDC on Mugabe through mass protests or other action also empowers Mugabe and undermines the possibility of change within ZANU-PF.

Comment

¶18. (C) We agree that President Mbeki is likely to put a positive spin on his Zimbabwe political facilitation efforts at the upcoming Lusaka SADC Summit. Mbeki will point to the two rounds of talks and agreement on procedural and other peripheral issues, and gloss over the lack of consensus on the core political issues. As reported in Ref F, we continue to be skeptical about the prospects of the Mbeki facilitation. Mugabe has consistently outplayed Mbeki, and appears to be doing it again. The SAG is unwilling to use its economic leverage by cutting off electricity or fuel exports. Threats of SADC condemning the March 2008 elections ring hollow, especially since Mugabe still has allies in the regional organization.

¶19. (C) For the first time, Mbeki faces serious domestic pressure to deal with the Zimbabwean crisis as thousands of Zimbabweans stream across the border every day. The deteriorating economic situation in Zimbabwe and deepening tensions within the ruling ZANU-PF party also present

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opportunities for SAG diplomacy. However, new motivation and opportunities may not be enough to force progress between the two parties.
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